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## The Association of the Miraculous Medal

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# **The Association of the Miraculous Medal**

*by Charles Shelby, C.M.*  
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18.VII.2002

## **1. Purpose of this Presentation**

### **1.1. Clear understanding of the AMM**

The first purpose of this presentation is to offer a brief, clear understanding of what the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the AMM, is. Many of you know the AMM as it is organized in your own country. But what is the essence of the AMM? It is simply to wear the Miraculous Medal. Anyone who wears a blessed Miraculous Medal is a member of the AMM. Only God knows the number of members!

### **1.2. International context**

The second purpose of this presentation is to set the AMM in an international context. The AMM is an international association. The Vatican has approved its statutes. In this context of an international association, the AMM is organized in different countries. In an international meeting like this, I will limit my presentation to the international AMM. You are welcome to share informally about the AMM in your country if you wish.

### **1.3. Vitality of the AMM**

The third purpose of this presentation is to assure you that the AMM is alive and well. In the stages of organizational development that are the themes for these presentations on the branches of the Vincentian Family, the AMM is in the midst of a powerful renewal. These are exciting times for us.

### **1.4. Direction of the AMM**

The fourth purpose of this presentation is to glimpse into the future and see what the new directions are for the AMM. Last October, the leaders of the AMM from around the world met in Rome. We produced a set of Convictions and Commitments that set our direction, and we made some requests of the Director General, Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M. One of those requests has led to my presence here today.

## 2. Short Outline of the AMM

Let us begin with an overview of the AMM. We all know the story of the Miraculous Medal and the apparitions to St. Catherine Labouré. They happened just a few meters from here. As you know, from those apparitions came the Children of Mary, now the Vincentian Marian Youth, or simply Marian Youth. And later the AMM gradually developed.

The AMM is an ecclesial, Marian, Vincentian association of the Christian faithful. However, it is not exclusively a *lay* association. Any member of the Christian faithful may be a member, including the clergy.

There are countless people who wear the Miraculous Medal. According to the statutes approved by the Vatican, *all* of them are members of the AMM. A much more useful concept is the number of members registered in the AMM where it is organized. There are perhaps 7,000,000 members registered in the different countries where the AMM has been established.

The AMM is always engaged in an apostolate. The exact nature of the apostolate varies from country to country.

### *A Short History of the AMM*

#### **a. Paris Association in 1847**

I understand that there has been an AMM since 1847, but it was only for Paris. It took over 60 years to establish an international Association of the Miraculous Medal.

#### **b. International Approval by Pius X in 1909**

Under statutes approved by Pope Pius X in 1909, the AMM was organized under a Director General and had diocesan directors. Members must be invested by a priest with a medal blessed by a member of the C.M. There were spiritual benefits for membership. Post-Vatican II regulations eliminated the requirement that the priest blessing the medal be a C.M.

#### **c. Minor revisions 1990**

At the request of the AMM in Perryville, in order to satisfy a great demand for investiture in the medal, the Vatican approved some two minor revisions to the statutes.

1. First, anyone who wears a medal blessed by a priest is a member. No longer is investiture a condition of membership.
2. Second, investiture was still presented as something desirable, and the 1990 statutes allowed a layperson to lead the investiture using medals previously blessed by a priest.

#### **d. Latest revision approved 1998**

In 1997, Fr. Maloney called together six leaders of the AMM to a meeting in Rome. This meeting produced the current version of the statutes, approved in 1998. These statutes launched the renewal of the AMM, as explained below.

### ***Nature of the AMM***

After that short history of the AMM, let us speak very quickly on the nature of the AMM.

#### **a. Ecclesial**

It is Ecclesial. It is Catholic. Although non-Catholics are free to join, they are outside the jurisdiction of the Church, so we simply cannot say anything about them with respect to our laws or statutes. They belong to the Blessed Mother and are her children, so we cannot prevent her from loving them, and we welcome them into her Association.

Nevertheless, we, the AMM, are Catholic. We support and love our Church. It is the context in which we live as an association.

#### **b. Marian**

The AMM is Marian. Mary is the origin of the AMM. Mary is the route of the AMM to Christ. She is our example in prayer and action.

#### **c. Vincentian**

The AMM is Vincentian, and this is a fascinating reality. It is no accident that Mary gave the Miraculous Medal to a Daughter of Charity and entrusted its promotion to a member of the Congregation of the Mission. Mary gave the Miraculous Medal to the world for the poor, the suffering of the whole world and especially France, who were without hope, like sheep without a shepherd. Mary sees Christ in all her children, especially the poor. Through the AMM, Mary continues to reach out to her poor children with her motherly love. What could be more Vincentian!

#### **d. Not Exclusively Lay**

The AMM is an association of the Christian faithful. As such, it can include clergy and religious. Although most members are lay, it is not *exclusively* lay.

### ***Size of the AMM***

#### **a. General Members are countless**

This is a brief discussion of the size of the AMM. Since anyone who wears the Medal is a member, there is no way to count the number of members. It is the only association of the Christian faithful without a register of members. The statutes call these unregistered people “general members.” Clearly the AMM is the largest association in the Church.

#### **b. Particular Members, perhaps 1-7 million, depending**

“Particular members” are registered locally in the association. This number is more possible to count, but still difficult, because there are many registers. Here are some numbers. The list is not exhaustive, but they add up to somewhere between one and seven million.

In the USA, the AMM in Perryville has 2 million “members” listed on its rosters, but these might be called affiliates, rather than members, since they are not personally active in the apostolate of the AMM. About 350,000 are on the active roster and participate in the apostolate. These could clearly be called active members. The AMM in Philadelphia has similar numbers — about 2,000,000 members who could be called affiliates, and about 350,000 participating members.

I apologize if I am not accurate with the remaining numbers because I have not heard them officially. In Spain, I believe there are about 2,000,000 family members who participate in the home-visit apostolate. These could be called members, since the parish centers register them. If there are four people in each family, then there are perhaps 15,000 in leadership, and they would be more active in the association.

I will give one more example, because they are very numerous. I think the Philippines have about 1,000,000 in their roster of affiliates. They also have parish centers like Spain, and that would add to the number of members there.

### ***Apostolate of the AMM***

The AMM has a number of apostolates beyond its primary mission of bringing the message of Mary conceived without sin to the world. Here are three examples.

#### **a. Home Visit**

A statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal moves each day of the month around a circle of 30 families. The family prayer ceremony includes greeting, devotional prayers, and farewell. There may also be instruction in the Christian life. This is primarily an apostolate to and for the family, but it also collects funds to assist the poor.

#### **b. Charity for the poor**

Secondly, national statutes determine how the money collected in the association may be used. Often it is for the poor of the parish, or it may benefit the poor elsewhere. Many AMM projects are done in collaboration with the Vincentian Family. Of course, a portion of the AMM funds also supports the operation of the association.

#### **c. Assist the C.M. ministries and missions**

Finally, in many areas, the AMM receives significant donations used to support the missions of the Congregation of the Mission or a province's ministries with the poor and the clergy. This often includes support of seminarians in formation and of infirm or retired members of the province.

## **3. Renewal of the AMM**

### **3.1. Foundation — First International Statutes of the AMM**

In preparation for this presentation, the speakers were given an outline of the five stages in the life of an organization. They are foundation, expansion, stabilization, breakthrough, and transition-renewal.

The first stage is foundation, and for the AMM, this stage can be summed up by our first international statutes.

#### **a. Structure of AMM in the First Statutes**

The AMM officially began with its statutes of 1909. These statutes seem to envision the AMM as something like a parish sodality. It stated that the purpose of the association was the sanctification of the members and participation in an unspecified apostolate.

## **b. Role of the Director General**

In the AMM, the statutes have always placed the highest leadership in a Director General, who is the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Originally, there were no specific duties, but he was the ultimate authority for the entire AMM.

## **c. Diocesan Structure**

The 1909 statutes envisioned a diocesan director, appointed by the bishop, and responsible for the association, canonically erected in the diocese by the bishop. In each diocese, the AMM could have its own “spirit, laws, and customs.”

## **3.2. Expansion — National Differences**

The second stage in the life of an organization is its expansion. After the original statutes were promulgated, the AMM was able to expand around the world. The first expansion was very rapid. During its time of expansion, the AMM developed national differences. Here are the most significant examples.

### **a. France**

The AMM in France was the original, even before the statutes of 1909. It now has the missions of the Congregation of the Mission in France as its apostolate. The chapel here in Paris is the center of prayer for the AMM in France.

### **b. Spain**

In Spain the AMM began in 1911. It is centered in the parish, renewing the family and assisting the poor.

### **c. USA**

In the early years, the AMM was founded at two places in the USA, corresponding to the two provinces of the CM in that nation. The first foundation was at Philadelphia in 1915, called the “Central Association of the Miraculous Medal,” and located on the east coast. The second was at Perryville in 1918, and it is called the “Association of the Miraculous Medal,” located in the center of the country. This is an accident of history and, to my knowledge, has no logical explanation.

Both groups are very similar, enrolling members throughout the country at the choice of the member. As their principal apostolate, they support the province of the Congregation of the Mission where their offices are located.

#### **d. Mexico**

The AMM in Mexico was founded in 1925 as a union of the associations in several dioceses. Like Spain, it is centered in the parish, with apostolates engaged in renewing the family and assisting the poor. It also has a strong catechetical character.

#### **e. Philippines**

A Spanish Vincentian who was educated in the United States established the AMM in the Philippines in 1957. This association combines features from the AMM in both Spain and USA.

#### **f. Elsewhere**

That is not the end of the expansion. These are just some of the earliest or largest examples. The AMM has been founded in many other areas and countries. Usually it has spread from Spain or follows the model of the AMM in Spain.

### **3.3. Stabilization — Some Growth, Few Changes**

Stabilization is the third stage in the life of an organization. After the AMM was established in a country, it settled into a stable pattern. Numbers increased gradually. There was little innovation necessary since the AMM was accomplishing its purpose as described in its statutes.

In the stable AMM, people were concerned with their own sanctification, and they participated in the apostolate of the AMM in their country. This period of stabilization lasted through Vatican Council II to 1997. The AMM never experienced a significant decline. This is not surprising since the Virgin Mary is in charge.

## **4. Breakthrough — Meeting in Rome, December 1997\***

#### **a. Share who we are, history, mission**

The breakthrough in the renewal of the AMM was quiet, but to those of us who were there, it was an exciting and historic event. The Director General called together six leaders of the AMM from France, Spain, the USA, Mexico, and the Philippines. Our first task was to get to know each other and share the stories and reality of the AMM that we were leading. It was overwhelming to see how Mary had reached out to her children so effectively in so many different ways. Our differences could not hide the common themes, shared values, and real sense of mission we held in common. There was no jealousy, only a celebration of the good work all of us were doing for the gospel, the Church, and

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\* In *Vincentiana* 42 (1998) 24-29.

the poor. This was truly a moment of grace.

## **b. Examine statutes**

Our second task was to examine the International Statutes and determine whether we should propose any revisions. Providentially, there was a canon lawyer among us, and someone who could write reports and documents. Much to the delight of the Director General, we emerged from our meeting with a polished set of new International Statutes in Latin, English, and Spanish — ready for approval by the Vatican.

### ***New International Statutes Approved February 1998\****

#### **1. Laid the Foundation for Renewal of the AMM**

The newly approved International Statutes made three very important developments that are the foundation of the renewal of the AMM. They are certainly the most important result of the breakthrough meeting of December 1997, and set the stage for all the new developments in the AMM.

#### **2. “Essential” Document**

The first thing to understand about the new statutes is that they are an “essential document.” They only say what is necessary. They do not impose significant limitations on the local association. They are meant to provide as much freedom as possible to achieve the purpose of the AMM. Because they carry Vatican approval, they should not go into such detail that they need to be revised frequently. There are other ways to specify particular details when they are necessary, ways that allow for easy change with different circumstances.

#### **3. Provided for Particular Statutes**

The most radical change to emerge in the International Statutes is that they provide for particular statutes in the places where the AMM is organized. In one simple statement, this provision is able to unite the AMM wherever in the world it is organized into one association. It brings us all together. It gives us all a single spokesperson for our international mission. At the same time, the Particular Statutes assure that everywhere the AMM will be able to carry out its particular mission affirmed by the approval of the statutes, and free from interference from above or below.

#### **4. Affirmed the Reality and Value of Inculturation**

The combination of an essential document and the provision for particular statutes has a wonderful effect. On the one hand, it recognizes that the AMM is really different in different parts of the world. And on the other hand, it recognizes that such differences are good, because they allow the AMM to operate effectively in the concrete reality of each country. The lesson of history, from when the AMM had no international structure, is that it does not have to be identical everywhere as long as it is true to the purpose in the International Statutes — in whatever way it can be true to that purpose. I believe that this is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the AMM in the Vincentian Family.

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\* In *Vincentiana* 42 (1998) 79-82.



### **c. Consider collaboration**

Our third task was to consider possible ways to collaborate. This was by far the most difficult task, since there was — and never had been — an international structure. We did not see the need for a complex centralized organization, but we recommended a secretariat to encourage communication, correspond with the different countries, and serve as a center for approving new particular statutes. Since the Director General already had a crowded schedule, this work fell immediately onto the shoulders of the newly named Vincentian Family Delegate, Fr. Benjamín Romo, one of the participants in our 1997 meeting.

## **3.5. Transition — Renewal**

### **Emergence of Coordination**

The final stage of renewal of an organization is the transition to the renewed form of the organization. This takes us into the present and the future, as I promised when I began. For the AMM, this phase has two areas that I would like to share with you. The first is particular statutes, which are the entry into the renewed AMM and the means by which it is organized. The second is what came from our international encounter last October.

## **4. The Expansion of Renewal**

### **4.1. Particular Statutes**

Time does not allow me to go deeply into the issue of particular statutes. However, it is important that you understand how they are at least as essential to the mission of the AMM as the International Statutes.

### **4.2. Purpose of Particular Statutes**

The purpose of particular statutes is to define the AMM in a specific location and to adapt it to the local culture and society. In this way, the AMM becomes a living, acting force for the gospel and the poor.

#### **a. Value of Particular Statutes**

Particular statutes are valuable for three reasons. First, they are the unifying link that aligns the AMM in a country with the international AMM. Second, they can meet the civil requirements for an association or organization in a particular country. Third, they create the local structures and organization that allows the AMM to function effectively in a given place and culture.

#### **b. Other Rules or Bylaws**

Particular statutes do not need to say everything. In fact, it is best if, in their own way, they are an “essential” document that leaves as many specific points as possible to local rules or bylaws that can be changed without recourse to the Director General. Such rules are strictly

internal. *How* the rules are created and *how* they are revised is something for the particular statutes to determine.

## **5. The First International Encounter, October 2001**

Coming from 28 countries on five continents, 70 leaders of the Association of the Miraculous Medal met in Rome for our first international encounter last October. Note that our statutes do not provide for an *assembly*; however, we can have an *encounter* or meeting.

That wonderful week provided the first real opportunity for the leaders of the AMM around the world to come together and experience real sharing, discovery, and affirmation of the good work God is doing in our midst. It led to a series of convictions and commitments, which you can find in the book published after the encounter, *Asociación de la Medalla Milagrosa: Una nueva Imagen para un nuevo Milenio*. There were also five recommendations to the Director General. The most important for us are the requests for an international organization, formation materials, and an information bulletin. A very brief outline of the encounter and the Final Document can be found in *Vincentiana*.\*

## **6. The Period after the Encounter**

### **6.1. New status in the Vincentian Family**

It has been only eight months since the encounter. Because of the encounter, our place as AMM within the Vincentian Family has become clearer. We are the largest organization in the Vincentian Family. We in the AMM realize the wealth to be found in our diversity as together we work toward our common mission. We have a renewed dedication to serve the abandoned poor in the spirit of St. Vincent, and we recognize that this mission comes to us from the Virgin Mary, who herself was poor and served the poor in her life. With the rest of the Vincentian Family, we seek greater formation resources. We are quite at home here in this encounter, Vincentian Month 2002.

### **6.2. International Coordinator**

The Director General was “creative to infinity” in responding to the requests of the AMM International Encounter. He recently named an “International Coordinator” to serve as his delegate in carrying out the function of Director General. The Director General added a “Coordinating Council” to assist his delegate. In this way he suddenly formed the “international structure” that was requested of him. Since he put me in that position, I now come before you to give this presentation. The task of the International Coordinator is not a full-time job.

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\* *Vincentiana* 45 (2001) 472-478.

## **7. The Future**

### **7.1. Communication**

I have been the International Coordinator for less than three weeks. You are the witnesses to the birth of a new service. Nothing is ready yet; everything is just beginning to be planned. Since this job is not full-time, I must still maintain my primary mission at the AMM in Perryville, Missouri, USA. A few things will emerge in the next few months, and I hope there will be something of value to the AMM everywhere by the start of 2003.

The first task of the International Coordinator is communication in the AMM. In order to communicate to the AMM as widely and as quickly as possible, much of this task of the International Coordinator will be done electronically. The Internet is a fast and inexpensive way to communicate. Personal communication can easily occur through email. General communication can be done through a web site.

#### **a. General Features of the Web Site**

The web site will be in English, French, and Spanish. It will include a calendar of events and a document resource library. I will begin work on the web site when I return from the Vincentian Month. It usually takes a few months to launch a web site.

#### **b. Electronic Newsletter**

In order to reach the AMM everywhere in the world as quickly and easily as possible, the international bulletin will be part of the web site. It will be quarterly. There will be messages from the Director General and the International Coordinator, features on the AMM in the different countries, announcements submitted by the countries, and links to new formation materials on the site.

#### **c. Practical Assistance for Leaders**

The web site will also have information to help the AMM leaders serve their members. Besides the documents resource library, there will be a section of formation materials of whatever kind we can gather. And there will be materials to help in the development of new groups of the AMM in the countries where it is not established or not fully organized.

### **7.2. Formation**

#### **a. Sharing of existing materials**

There are AMM formation materials available in different places. I hope to be able to gather them in a form that I can publish on the web site and, in that

way, make them available as widely possible. As a service, I hope to prepare translations of the materials in the three languages of the site. Collecting and translating the existing formation materials will itself add to our supply of formation materials.

There are also formation materials in the other branches of the Vincentian Family. With their permission, we can adopt them in the AMM and adapt them to our unique mission. In a similar way, our own materials may be useful to the other branches of the Vincentian Family.

## **b. Development of new materials**

As time passes, new materials will appear. If I learn about them, I can post them on the web site for everyone. And if there are enough requests for a particular type of material, I can serve as a contact point for the request.

## **7.3. Collaboration**

### **a. Networking**

I hope to add a section to the web site where leaders can sign in and carry out interactive discussions. This would also be a way to show interest in some new formation topic. If enough leaders want a resource, someone may be willing to produce it.

I know from my own experience that leaders are busy people. Email will be a simple way to communicate. And I can use email to send announcements and reminders occasionally. My style is to send a simple message and refer to a page on the web site for full information, available when it is convenient.

### **b. How can we work together?**

Collaboration means working together. I want to work with the leaders of the AMM and meet their needs so they can meet their members' needs. Please contact me with your ideas and hopes. We can discuss them together and work together to make our dreams become a reality.

My job title is "International Coordinator." The words do not mean that I do everything. Rather, I work to bring together people and resources so the Virgin Mary's work can be done. The AMM is an association of us all. To borrow an expression, together we can do more than we can ever do separately.

That is a brief glimpse into the future of the International AMM. I hope you find it as interesting and exciting as I do. Thank you for your attention.